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HOMESPUN HEROICS

By Claude Pamares

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One of the habitués of Skinner's grocery, at the village of Skinnerville, was Abe Langford. He became a "sitter" when he was twenty years old, and for twelve years he never missed but one night. That was the night of his marriage to the Widow Durham. She was his senior by ten years, and she married him mostly that he might have a mother. Every night, rain or shine, summer or winter, Abe was there.

During the first year the old veterans crowded him around somewhat, but after that one of the cracker barrels was marked with his initials and duly recognized as his throne.

As for occupation, Abe was most anything. He did a day's work here and there, but the wife mainly supported the two of them by sewing for the neighbors. Abe was mild mannered and easy going, and he was not much of a talker.

But Abe Langford's wife knew him better than his fellow sitters. They had often remarked among themselves that he had no ambition. She knew better. Under that quiet and humble demeanor was hidden away an ambition that longed to soar and impatiently waited its opportunity. Almost every night when Abe reached home he said:

"Doggone it, I don't amount to shucks and never will. Why hain't I as big a man as Deacon White?"

"What's the deacon been doin'?"

"A horse thief tried to git into his barn last night, and the dog woke the deacon up, and he went out and yelled at the fellow that if he didn't git out mighty sudden he'd let go a hull bushel of buckshot at him. He's a hero, the deacon is. When he got through tellin' the story Skinner offered to trust him for ten pounds of sugar all to once."

"Everybody can't be a hero," answered the wife, with a sigh.

"What do you s'pose happened to Elijah Smallman two or three years ago?"



HE HUNG ON TO THE STERN AND GOT THE BOW POINTED STRAIGHT.

"I can't say. I don't remember of his tellin' that anything did."

"No, he never told a human being about it till tonight, and then he made us all promise never to breathe a word to a soul. Lordy, but the chills went up and down my back while he was tellin' it!"

"What was it?"

"He saw a murderer. His dog barked about midnight, and he got up and looked out of the window and saw a murderer snoopin' around. The feller even came up and rattled on the kitchen door. The dog put his tail down and made a sneak and didn't come home for two days. Lijah said he got so weak in the knees that he could hardly get back to bed, and he covered up his head for more'n an hour afterwards."

"How did he know it was a murderer?"

"Because the feller had on a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes and was crouched over. That's the way they allus do. Yes, he was a regular mur-

derer. A week later a tin peddler come along and told Lijah that a hull family had been murdered about fifty miles away the very next night. If the dog hadn't barked the Smallman family would have been wiped out. Do I ever see a murderer snoopin' around?"

"Land o'-massy, but I hope not!"

"But I orter see one, same as other folks. If I ever do see one I won't stand and tremble and shake. No, sir, I won't. I'll just go right out to him and tell him to hump himself out of that or he'll have me in his hair, but I shan't never see one. There's no such good luck for me."

"But you hain't done so bad," observed the wife in soothing tones. "You fell in the river once, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you had a fight with a lightnin' rod man?"

"Yes."

"And a mad dog chased you up a ladder?"

"But what does all them things amount to agin injuns and murderers? I want to be a hero, same as other folks. If I'd ask Skinner to trust me for ten pounds of sugar all to once he'd drop dead."

"Waal," said the wife as she rose up to prepare for bed, "you are doin' all you can, and nobody can't do any better. If you live long 'nuff mebbe your chance will come."

It was on the road and only two weeks away. A millionaire had his summer home on the bank of the river running through the village. His eighteen-year-old daughter was fond of rowing, and it was an almost everyday sight to see her skimming along in her boat. There had been heavy midsummer rains, and the river had gradually risen until the water poured over the dam like a Niagara. There was a drop of twelve feet, with three or four waves at the bottom rising up and curling over in a menacing way. One day, at the highest stage of the water, three young ladies appeared on the pond in a boat. The rich man's daughter was taking company out for a row. Two hundred feet above the dam, as she attempted to turn and go back, one of the oars snapped, and in her sudden panic she lost the other, while the boat turned broadside to the stream. To go over the dam in that fashion meant death to all.

Abe Langford had been salvaging sawlogs and boards from the river with rope and hook and stood on the bank when the disaster to the boat occurred. There were others higher up and lower down who were startled by the screams of the girls, but not one of them grasped the situation. It was left for Abe. Off came his coat, vest and shoes, and in he plunged. A score of men called to him that he could never hope to tow the boat ashore, but that wasn't his plan. There was just a chance that if the girls kept quiet and the boat was guided over the dam how first she wouldn't fill or be upset. Abe caught it when it was yet fifty feet from the plunge, and, whirling it about, he hung on to the stern and got the bow pointed straight. Then he said to the girls:

"We have got to go over the dam. All of you crouch down and hang on for your lives. If you make one move we shall all be drowned."

There was screaming and yelling and shouting all along the banks, but Abe Langford was not rattled. Two of the girls had fainted away, and the other was dumb with fright. The boat half filled, but floated through to safety, and, guiding and swimming, Abe brought her to the bank. He had done a brave deed, and his fellow townsmen were unstinted in their praise. He took it all in his humble way, and as soon as he could escape them he went shivering home.

"Good lands, Abe Langford, but what's the matter?" exclaimed the wife on beholding his saturated condition.

"Just saved three gals from drownin'," he replied.

"Then you are a hero at last?"

"Durn the luck, no! In all the stories I've ever read the hero marries the gal whose life he saves. There was three of 'em, and what am I goin' to do about it? Besides, if there wasn't but one I'd be married to you just the same, wouldn't I? I tell you luck is agin me, and I shall never have a fair show."

"Waal, git off your wet clothes and mebbe you'll be chased by a mad bull tomorrer," said the motherly wife as she began drying his wet hair with a towel.



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